DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 403 101 RC 020 895

AUTHOR Krashen, Stephen

TITLE Why Bilingual Education? ERIC Digest.
INSTITUTION ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools, Charleston, WV.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO EDO-RC-96-8
PUB DATE Jan 97
CONTRACT RR93002012
NOTE 4p.
AVAILABLE FROM ERIC/CRESS, P.O. Box 1348, Charleston, WV 25325-1348 (free).
PUB TYPE Information Analyses - ERIC Clearinghouse Products (071)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Bilingual Education; *Criticism; *Educational Attitudes; *Educational Research; Elementary Secondary Education; Limited English Speaking; Native Language Instruction; *Public Opinion; Spanish Speaking
IDENTIFIERS ERIC Digests

ABSTRACT

This digest examines criticism of bilingual education and its effect on public opinion, discusses the rationale underlying good bilingual education programs, and summarizes research findings that reveal programs' effectiveness. Quality bilingual education provides students with knowledge and literacy in their first language, which indirectly but powerfully aid them as they strive for English proficiency. The best bilingual education programs include English-as-a-Second Language instruction, instruction in the first language, sheltered subject matter classes using intermediate-level English, and transition to the mainstream through gradual exit plans. A common argument against bilingual education is the observation that many people have succeeded without it. However, such people have often had the advantages of early schooling in their country of origin. Children who arrive with a good education in their primary language have already gained two objectives of a good bilingual education program: literacy and subject matter development. Research indicates that the ability to read transfers across languages, even when the writing systems are different. Despite what is presented to the public in the national media, research reveals much public support for bilingual education. Apparent opposition to bilingual education is often actually opposition to specific practices or regulations related to bilingual education. The "evidence" against bilingual education is not convincing and often involves mislabeling. Bilingual education could be improved by increasing student access to books in both languages. Contains 18 references. (SV)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

EDO-RC-96-8

January 1997

Why Bilingual Education?

by Stephen Krashen

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

- This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
- Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

- Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

M Slack

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

EDO-RC-96-8 January 1997

Why Bilingual Education?

by Stephen Krashen

BILINGUAL education continues to receive criticism in the national media. This Digest examines some of the criticism, and its effect on public opinion, which often is based on misconceptions about bilingual education's goals and practice. The Digest explains the rationale underlying good bilingual education programs and summarizes research findings about their effectiveness.

When schools provide children quality education in their primary language, they give them two things: knowledge and literacy. The *knowledge* that children get through their first language helps make the English they hear and read more comprehensible. *Literacy* developed in the primary language transfers to the second language. The reason is simple: Because we learn to read by reading—that is, by making sense of what is on the page (Smith, 1994)—it is easier to learn to read in a language we understand. Once we can read in one language, we can read in general.

The combination of first language subject matter teaching and literacy development that characterizes good bilingual programs indirectly but powerfully aids students as they strive for a third factor essential to their success: English proficiency. Of course, we also want to teach in English directly, via high quality English-as-a-second language (ESL) classes, and through sheltered subject matter teaching, where intermediate-level English language acquirers learn subject matter taught in English.

The best bilingual education programs include all of these characteristics: ESL instruction, sheltered subject matter teaching, and instruction in the first language. Non-English-speaking children initially receive core instruction in the primary language along with ESL instruction. As children grow more proficient in English, they learn subjects using more contextualized language (e.g., math and science) in sheltered classes taught in English, and eventually in mainstream classes. In this way, the sheltered classes function as a bridge between instruction in the first language and in the mainstream. In advanced levels, the only subjects done in the first language are those demanding the most abstract use of language (social studies and language arts). Once full mainstreaming is complete, advanced first language development is available as an option. *Gradual exit plans*, such as these, avoid problems associated with exiting children too early (before the English they encounter is comprehensible) and provide instruction in the first language where it is most needed. These plans also allow children to have the advantages of advanced first language development.

Success Without Bilingual Education?

A common argument against bilingual education is the observation that many people have succeeded without it. This has certainly happened. In these cases, however, the successful person got plenty of comprehensible input in the second language, and in many cases had a de facto bilingual education program. For example, Rodriguez (1982) and de la Peña (1991) are often cited as counter-evidence to bilingual education.

Rodriguez (1982) tells us that he succeeded in school without a special program and acquired a very high level of English literacy. He had two crucial advantages, however, that most limited-English-proficient (LEP) children do not have. First, he grew up in an English-speaking neighborhood in Sacramento, California, and thus got a great deal of informal comprehensible input from classmates. Many LEP children today encounter English only at school; they live in neighborhoods where Spanish prevails. In addition, Rodriguez became a voracious reader, which helped him acquire academic language. Most LEP children have little access to books.

De la Peña (1991) reports that he came to the United States at age nine with no English competence and claims that he succeeded without bilingual education. He reports that he acquired English rapidly, and "by the end of my first school year, I was among the top students." De la Peña, however, had the advantages of bilingual education: In Mexico, he was in the fifth grade, and was thus literate in Spanish and knew subject matter. In addition, when he started school in the United States he was put back two grades. His superior knowledge of subject matter helped make the English input he heard more comprehensible.

Children who arrive with a good education in their primary language have already gained two of the three objectives of a good bilingual education program—literacy and subject matter knowledge. Their success is good evidence for bilingual education.

What About Languages Other Than Spanish?

Porter (1990) states that "even if there were a demonstrable advantage for Spanish-speakers learning to read first in their home language, it does not follow that the same holds true for speakers of languages that do not use the Roman alphabet" (p. 65). But it does. The ability to read transfers across languages, even when the writing systems are different.

There is evidence that reading ability transfers from Chinese to English (Hoover, 1982), from Vietnamese to English (Cummins, Swain, Nakajima, Handscombe, Green, & Tran, 1984), from Japanese to English (Cummins et al.), and from Turkish to Dutch (Verhoeven, 1991). In other words, those who read well in one language, read well in the second language (as long as length of residence in the country is taken into account because of the first language loss that is common).

Bilingual Education And Public Opinion

Opponents of bilingual education tell us that the public is against bilingual education. This impression is a result of the way the question is asked. One can easily get a near-100-percent rejection of bilingual education when the question is biased. Porter (1990), for example, states that "Many

ERIC DIGEST

Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools
including Alaska Natives and American Indians, Mexican Americans, Migrants, and Outdoor Education

Appalachia Educational Laboratory
PO Box 1348
Charleston, WV
25325-1348

RC020895

parents are not committed to having the schools maintain the mother tongue if it is at the expense of gaining a sound education and the English-language skills needed for obtaining jobs or pursuing higher education" (p. 8). Who *would* support mother tongue education at such a price?

However, when respondents are simply asked whether or not they support bilingual education, the degree of support is quite strong: From 60-99 percent of samples of parents and teachers say they support bilingual education (Krashen, 1996). In a series of studies, Shin (Shin, 1994; Shin & Gribbons, 1996) examined attitudes toward the principles underlying bilingual education. Shin found that many respondents agree with the idea that the first language can be helpful in providing background knowledge, most agree that literacy transfers across languages, and most support the principles underlying continuing bilingual education (economic and cognitive advantages).

The number of people opposed to bilingual education is probably even less than these results suggest; many people who say they are opposed to bilingual education are actually opposed to certain practices (e.g., inappropriate placement of children) or are opposed to regulations connected to bilingual education (e.g., forcing teachers to acquire another language to keep their jobs).

Despite what is presented to the public in the national media, research has revealed much support for bilingual education. McQuillan and Tse (in press) reviewed publications appearing between 1984 and 1994, and reported that 87 percent of academic publications supported bilingual education, but newspaper and magazine opinion articles tended to be antibilingual education, with only 45 percent supporting bilingual education. One wonders what public support would look like if bilingual education were more clearly defined in such articles and editorials.

The Research Debate

It is sometimes claimed that research does not support the efficacy of bilingual education. Its harshest critics, however (e.g., Rossell & Baker, 1996), do not claim that bilingual education does not work; instead, they claim there is little evidence that it is superior to all-English programs. Nevertheless, the evidence used against bilingual education is not convincing. One major problem is in labeling. Several critics, for example, have claimed that English immersion programs in El Paso and McAllen, Texas, were shown to be superior to bilingual education. In each case, however, programs labeled *immersion* were really bilingual education, with a substantial part of the day taught in the primary language. In another study, Gersten (1985) claimed that all-English immersion was better than bilingual education. However, the sample size was small and the duration of the study was short; also, no description of "bilingual education" was provided. For a detailed discussion, see Krashen (1996).

On the other hand, a vast number of other studies have shown that bilingual education is effective, with children in well-designed programs acquiring academic English at least as well and often better than children in all-English programs (Cummins, 1989; Krashen, 1996; Willig, 1985). Willig concluded that the better the experimental design of the study, the more positive were the effects of bilingual education.

Improving Bilingual Education

Bilingual education has done well, but it can do much better. The biggest problem, in this author's view, is the absence of books—in both the first and second languages—in the lives of students in these programs. Free voluntary reading can help all components of bilingual education: It can be a source of comprehensible input in English or a means for developing knowledge and literacy through the first language, and for continuing first language development.

Limited-English-proficient Spanish-speaking children have little access to books at home (about 22 books per home for the entire family according to Ramirez, Yuen, Ramey, & Pasta, 1991) or at school (an average of one book in Spanish per Spanish-speaking child in some school libraries in schools with bilingual programs, according to Pucci, 1994). A book flood in both languages is clearly called for. Good bilingual programs have brought students to the 50th percentile on standardized tests of English reading by grade five (Burnham-Massey & Pina, 1990). But with a good supply of books in both first and second languages, students can go far beyond the 50th percentile. It is possible that we might then have the Lake Wobegon effect, where all of the children are above average, and we can finally do away with the tests (and put the money saved to much better use).

References

Burnham-Massey, L., & Pina, M. (1990). Effects of bilingual instruction on English academic achievement of LEP students. *Reading Improvement, 27*(2), 129-132.

Cummins, J. (1989). *Empowering minority students*. Sacramento, CA: California Association for Bilingual Education.

Cummins, J., Swain, M., Nakajima, K., Handscombe, J., Green, D., & Tran, C. (1984). Linguistic interdependence among Japanese and Vietnamese immigrant students. In C. Rivera (Ed.), *Communicative competence approaches to language proficiency assessment: Research and application*, pp. 60-81. Clevedon, England: Multilingual Matters. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 249 793)

de la Peña, F. (1991). *Democracy or Babel? The case for official English in the United States*. Washington, DC: U.S. English.

Gersten, R. (1985). Structured immersion for language-minority students: Results of a longitudinal evaluation. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 7*(3), 187-196.

Hoover, W. (1982). *Language and literacy learning in bilingual education: Preliminary report. Cantanese site analytic study*. Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 245 572)

Krashen, S. (1996). *Under attack: The case against bilingual education*. Culver City, CA: Language Education Associates.

McQuillan, J., & Tse, L. (in press). Does research matter? An analysis of media opinion on bilingual education, 1984-1994. *Bilingual Research Journal*.

Porter, R. P. (1990). *Forked tongue: The politics of bilingual education*. New York: Basic Books.

Pucci, S. L. (1994). Supporting Spanish language literacy: Latino children and free reading resources in schools. *Bilingual Research Journal, 18*(1-2), 67-82.

Ramirez, J. D., Yuen, S., Ramey, D., & Pasta, D. (1991). *Longitudinal study of structured English immersion strategy, early-exit and late-exit bilingual education programs for language-minority children (Final Report, Vols. 1 & 2)*. San Mateo, CA: Aguirre International. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 330 216)

Rodriguez, R. (1982). *Hunger of memory: The education of Richard Rodriguez. An autobiography*. Boston: D. R. Godine.

Rossell, C., & Baker, R. (1996). The educational effectiveness of bilingual education. *Research in the Teaching of English, 30*(1), 7-74.

Shin, F. (1994). Attitudes of Korean parents toward bilingual education. *BEOutreach Newsletter, California State Department of Education, 5*(2), pp. 47-48.

Shin, F., & Gribbons, B. (1996). Hispanic parents' perceptions and attitudes of bilingual education. *Journal of Mexican-American Educators*, 16-22.

Smith, F. (1994). *Understanding reading: A psycholinguistic analysis of reading and learning to read (5th ed.)*. Hillsdale, NJ: L. Erlbaum.

Verhoeven, L. (1991). Acquisition of literacy. *Association Internationale de Linguistique Appliquee (AILA) Review, 8*, 61-74.

Willig, A. (1985). A meta-analysis of selected studies on the effectiveness of bilingual education. *Review of Educational Research, 55*, 269-316.

Stephen Krashen is a professor of education at the University of Southern California.

This publication was prepared with funding from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, under contract no. RR93002012. The opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of OERI, the Department, or AEL.

The ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools is operated by the Appalachia Educational Laboratory (AEL), Inc. AEL serves as the Regional Educational Laboratory for Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia and operates the Regional Technology Consortium and the Eisenhower Regional Consortium for Mathematics and Science Education for these same four states. In addition, it serves as the Region IV Comprehensive Technical Assistance Center. AEL is an Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity Employer.